

Japan envoy hails citizens' movement

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT
Japanese Ambassador in Dhaka Matsushiro Horiguchi welcomed the citizens' movement named 'honest and competent candidate movement', as suggested by Prof Muhammad Yunus, and hoped that people of Bangladesh would conduct the next election in a free and fair way.
"We welcome and send big cheers to this movement as we sincerely wish Bangladesh to continue its economic and social growth," he said while making his annual policy speech at the National Press Club yesterday.
"I would emphasise that the next election has to be held with participation of all political parties for the sake of development and institutionalisation of democracy in Bangladesh," Horiguchi added.
The outgoing Japanese ambassador said it is desirable that both the ruling and the opposition

NEW BIMAN FREIGHT CHARGES

Export of vegetables grinds to a halt

EXPORTERS CLAIM \$5 LAKH LOSS IN 3 DAYS
REAZ AHMAD
The country's exports of vegetables, fruits and betel leaf to European and Middle Eastern markets have remained suspended since May 1 following a sudden rise in freight charges of Bangladesh Biman Airlines.
Exporters claimed to have already lost businesses worth \$5 lakh as they could not ship around 213 tonne goods in the last three days. They feared they may ultimately lose these markets to competitors like India and Malaysia if Biman fails to resolve the crisis immediately.
Biman authorities last Tuesday told The Daily Star that to make its freight charges for perishable items "cost-effective", the airline has increased the shipment charge of vegetable products by 25 per cent on an average.
Leaders of the Bangladesh Fruits, Vegetables and Allied Products Exporters' Association declined to pay the enhanced cargo rate, considering it is not cost-effective for exports.
"We met the state minister for civil aviation and tourism on May 1 and he advised us to resolve the issue through discussion with the Biman management," the association's Senior Vice President Md Mansur told The Daily Star on Tuesday.
An hour-long meeting on May 1 between the exporters' body and Biman's managing director, however, concluded without any resolution, he said.
The freight charge of vegetables to Dammam was increased from \$1.12 to \$2.12 per kilogram, to the UK, Italy, France and Germany from \$1.55 to \$2, and to Dubai and Maskat from \$0.75 to \$0.85.
"Importers in these countries told us that it would not be possible for them to market the vegetables,"



Delicious summer fruit palm are brought to the capital in abundance. The photo was taken at Badamtali Ghat wholesale market yesterday.

Govt planning to rig polls thru' fake voter list

ALLEGES HASINA
UNB, Dhaka
Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged the lawyers to come up with ideas for taking legal steps to resist the "rulers' conspiracy" to rig the next elections.
"I am calling upon the lawyers to think how to foil the conspiracy of the ruling alliance," Hasina, also the Awami League (AL) chief, said when newly elected chairman of Tongi Pourasava Advocate Azmatullah Khan and 14 pro-AL commissioners called on her at the party's Dhanmondi office in the afternoon.
Accusing the government of making fake voter list, Hasina said that the government is planning to snatch the democratic rights of countrymen defying the directive

RELIGIOUS RIGHTS

Bangladesh on US watch list

US BODY SLAMS RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION IN ALLIES
REUTERS, Washington
AUS government commission warned on Wednesday of rising religious persecution in Iraq and Afghanistan, two countries invaded by the United States in the past five years to free their people from tyranny and abuse.
The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, in its annual report to Congress and President George W. Bush's administration, also harshly criticized three key US allies -- Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Egypt -- for their poor performance on religious rights.
The commission designated 11 countries as being "of particular

CHITTAGONG PORT

Long queue makes berthing costly

RAFIQ HASAN
Bringing container ships to Chittagong port has become expensive due to a long queue of ships at the outer anchorage and for lack of space in the container yard.
The port authority is now asking shipping agents not to unload containers in the first shift due to lack of space in the container yard. As a result, the ships have to wait additional 12 hours to start discharging the containers after berthing at the terminal.
Normally, ships book unloading equipment at least for three shifts to discharge containers and the process takes three to four days. But now the time has increased to five to six days for unloading the ships after arrival at the terminal.
Earlier, the port authority asked shipping agents not to bring in more container ships to avoid losses due to delay in discharging containers.
The turn around time to Singapore for the feeder ships has also been increased to 25 days from 15 days. A ship now takes at least 25 days to go back to Singapore after discharging containers at Chittagong. Earlier, the turn around time was maximum 15 days. A ship has to count at least \$15,000 to \$ 25,000 extra for a day's delay.
Shipping agents said most of the ships coming to Chittagong are rented on the basis of time charter.
The cost of time charter of a medium range ocean going ship is no less than \$10,000 per day. There are some big ships that even charge \$20,000 a day for charter. Besides, there are some fixed operating costs amounting to no less than \$5,000 for a ship per day, a source pointed out.
So, bringing ships to Chittagong is becoming difficult and expensive



Bangladesh Biman Employees' Steering Committee Convenor Fakhru Alam Bhuiyan addresses a meeting yesterday demanding cancellation of the government move to offload the national airline's shares.

HC bans entry of 'toxic' ship

AFP, Dhaka
A Bahamian-registered ship that environmentalists say is "toxic" and was due to be dismantled in Bangladesh has been banned from entering its territorial waters by the High Court, lawyers said yesterday.
Alfaship, which arrived in the outer anchorage of Chittagong Port, is one of 50 ships on a "watch-list" of vessels being monitored by Greenpeace.
The High Court issued the ruling yesterday after the Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (Bela) challenged the legality of the vessel's entry into the country's waters.
"The court banned the ship from making any further move into Bangladesh territorial waters for two months," Bela Executive Director Rizwana Hassan told AFP.
Greek-managed LSP Tanker Corporation which owns the ship said yesterday that standard industry "decontamination" procedures had been carried out before the vessel left a port in Greece.
"Prior to commencing her final voyage, the Alfaship was made gas free and emptied of oil cargo residues," company spokesman Nicholas Brown said in a statement.
"Alfaship is no different from hundreds of tankers and other merchant vessels sold for demolition in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan in recent years. The fact that the ship appears on a list on the website of Greenpeace appears to be completely arbitrary," he added.
The company said it would continue to cooperate fully with the Bangladeshi authorities to ensure it met all its requirements.
The High Court ban follows a temporary order last week by the Bangladesh government's Mercantile Marine Department

Cellphones worth Tk 25 lakh seized at ZIA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Customs officials seized cellphones worth around Tk 25 lakh at Zia International Airport (ZIA) yesterday.
The cellphones were seized from a luggage flown in by a Gulf Air flight from Dubai which landed at ZIA 8:00am. The luggage tag had the name of Hassan Ali, ZIA sources said.

Dozens killed in Iraq as parliament meets

AFP, Baghdad
Dozens of people were killed across Iraq yesterday in bombings and execution-style sectarian shootings as parliament convened for its first working session since elections in December.
In the deadliest attack, a suicide bomber killed 18 people and wounded 30 when he blew himself amid dozens of police recruits queuing outside police headquarters in Fallujah, in restive Al-Anbar province.
The attack was a clear bid to stop young men from joining Iraqi security forces.
A number of tribal chiefs in the province have urged young men to join the security forces at the behest of the US military and the Iraqi government to take on the al-Qaeda led insurgency.
Iraqi police also found 36 bullet-riddled bodies of men killed in apparent sectarian killings.
An interior ministry official said 14 bodies were found in eastern Baghdad, added to 20 more from various areas of the capital late Tuesday.
Two more bodies were found in the town of Al-Mussayib, 80km south of Baghdad.
Hundreds of such bodies have surfaced across Iraq, mostly in Baghdad, since the bombing of a revered Shia shrine in February.
Iraq's Sunni Arab leaders blame the country's Shia-led interior ministry forces of operating death squads that carry out extra-judicial killings of Sunni Arabs.
On Wednesday, insurgents also killed eight people, including four college students, in Baghdad's notorious violent Al-Dura neighbourhood.
"Insurgents set up a checkpoint on the highway in Al-Dura and stopped a minibus full of college students. They pulled four students out of the bus and shot them dead," the interior ministry official said.
Two civilians were killed in an explosion near a popular market in Baghdad's Al-Shuala neighborhood that also left 15 people wounded, he said, and two policemen were killed in Baquba, north of Baghdad.
Meanwhile, parliament convened Wednesday even as Iraq remains without a new government

CASE AGAINST BABAR Hearing on acceptability May 23

COURT CORRESPONDENT
A Dhaka court yesterday fixed May 23 for hearing on the acceptability of the case filed against state minister for home affairs and 52 others in connection with the death of Jubo League leader Masudur Rahman Iman Ali in Rab-claimed "crossfire."
Judge Mohammad Momin Ullah of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court set the date after receiving the lower court record.
Earlier on March 28, the same court took up the case following a criminal revision filed by Nazrul Islam, elder brother of the victim, against the dismissal order of the lower court.
On March 22, Metropolitan Magistrate AJM Abdullahel Baqui

